DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 144 PS 020 644

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TITLE Predictive Validity of the Caregiver's School Readiness Inventory.
PUB DATE Jun 92
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Psychological Association (Quebec City, Quebec, Canada, June 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Alphabets; *At Risk Persons; Childrens Literature; *Elementary School Students; Foreign Countries; Grade 1; Grade 2; Kindergarten; Longitudinal Studies; *Predictive Validity; Primary Education; Reading Skills; *School Readiness; *Screening Tests; Test Content; Test Reliability; *Test Validity
IDENTIFIERS *Caregivers School Readiness Inventory; Parent Expectations

ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the predictive validity of the Caregiver's School Readiness Inventory (CSRI), a new screening measure developed for use in situations in which it may not be appropriate to employ traditional screening measures to identify preschool children at risk for school failure. The three items of the CSRI concern: (1) children's books available to the child at home; (2) the child's knowledge of the alphabet; and (3) parents' expectations for their child's reading success at the end of first grade. Parents or guardians of 226 children completed the CSRI in the November or December after the children entered kindergarten. Test reliability was confirmed by data obtained from a second completion of the CSRI by 26 randomly-selected caregivers the following April. Children's academic success was measured by teacher's judgments as indicated on promotion lists at the end of kindergarten and report cards at the end of first and second grade, and by scores on several standardized tests. Results indicated an average correlation of 0.49 between scores on the CSRI and children's school performance through the end of second grade. Children whose CSRI scores were low were more likely to exhibit poor academic performance than were children whose CSRT scores were high. The participating children were students in 11 elementary public schools in London, Ontario. A list of 48 references is provided. (BC)

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Research report presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Psychological Association, Quebec City, Quebec, June, 1992.

Predictive Validity of the Caregiver's School Readiness Inventory

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Abstract

The Caregiver's School Readiness Inventory (CSRI) is a new screening device developed for use in situations where it may not appropriate to employ other more traditional screening measures to identify preschool children at risk for failure. This three-year longitudinal investigation was undertaken to evaluate the predictive validity of the CSRI. The caregivers of 226 children completed the CSRI shortly after the children started kindergarten. The evidence showed, first, that the children's scores on the CSRI produced an average correlation of .49 with the children's performances in school through the end of grade two and, second, that for children whose scores were near the bottom of the scale the odds of failure were quite high whereas for children whose scores were near the top of the scale this was not the case.

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The failure rate in North American schools has risen sharply since the mid-1970s and it is now estimated that the rate is in the neighborhood of 20% to 25% (Medway & Rose, 1986; Smith & Shepard, 1987). These statistics mean that by the end of high school approximately one out of every four or five students will have repeated a grade at least once. Because grade retention produces many undesirable side effects, this high rate of failure has become an issue of major concern to educators and parents alike (Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Johnson, 1981). To help reduce the failure rate school boards today are being urged to initiate programs to identify children who are at risk for failure before they enter school and to place these children in a properly designed preschool compensatory education program (see the position statement on student retention adopted by the National Association of School Psychologists, July, 1982).

At present two approaches are widely employed in an effort to locate preschool children who might profit from being in such programs. The first approach is to have a school psychologist or a psychometrist administer some form of psychometric screening test to all children near the start of the kindergarten year. The second approach consists of having the children's teachers complete an observation checklist or inventory detailing each child's daily in-class behaviors.

Although both approaches can be quite effective in identifying an at-risk preschool child, there are times when it may not be appropriate to use either approach. For example, if a child lacks patience, is shy, will not cooperate with the examiner, or if a child fails to understand the instructions, a score on a screening test might not provide accurate information about a child's learning potential. Similarly, if the child's teacher has not had sufficient opportunity to observe the child in class because the child is often absent from school or because the child begins school late in the semester, the teacher's judgement of the frequency with which certain behaviors take place could easily be in error.

When situations like these arise still a third approach to early identification is to obtain information about the child from an inventory completed by the child's parent or guardian. While many inventories of this nature do exist (for examples see Barnes, 1982; Berdine & Meyer, 1987; Johansson, 1965; Lichtenstein & Ireton, 1984; Meisels & Wiske, 1988; Zeitlin, 1976), unfortunately, most of these inventories suffer from shortcomings than could seriously hamper their usefulness in any screening program. First, the vast majority contain well over 100 items which make them extremely time consuming to administer. Second, as Lichtenstein and Ireton point out, many of the items on these inventories are not necessarily appropriate for screening. For instance, a large number of inventories have items that some parents may be reluctant to answer because they deal with matters of a personal or sensitive nature, such as family income, marital status, or the parent's level of education. Many inventories also contain items which require detailed medical histories that parents often answer incorrectly.

Of greatest concern, though, a large number of the items on these inventories are now known to have little or no bearing on later school performance. Take for example the Minnesota Preschool Inventory (MPI) which has 150 items. According to the follow-up evidence gathered by Ireton, Shing-Lun, and Kampen (1981), nearly 70% of the items on this inventory produce correlations with later school achievement that simply are too low to justify their use in identifying an at-risk preschool child. Items from the MPI that fall into this category include those dealing with self-help skills, expressive language skills, immature as well as hyperactive behaviors, and behavioral as well as emotional problems. Similar findings that question the validity of other items on parent inventories have also been reported by Colligan (1976), Gallerani, O'Regan, and Reinherz (1982), Johansson (1965), and Share, Jorm, Maclean, and Matthews (1984). Here the list includes items concerned with such matters as the number of hours a child watches television, whether a child has a library membership, the child's birth order and birth month, as well as whether the child's mother experienced complications during her pregnancy or whether the child was born prematurely. The problem, of course, with requiring parents to answer items that correlate poorly with school performance is that the information generated by these items could lead to an improper referral decision.

Since there will always be at least a few children for whom parental information might be the only source of information on

which to base a referral, it was considered important to construct a new parent inventory having an appropriate set of items. With this goal in mind we conducted a thorough review of the research evidence dealing with material that parents can provide on matters related to their children's readiness for school. This review covered all of the reports listed in the ERIC data base, the Psychological Abstracts, and the Child Development Abstracts published between 1970 and the mid-1980s. Our aim in performing this review was to find material that could be used to construct items that parents would be willing to answer, that they could be expected to answer reliably, and that could be used to forecast with reasonable accuracy, a child's success in school. The outcome of this review can be seen in the Caregiver's School Readiness Inventory (CSRI) illustrated in Figure 1.

The first item on the CSRI is based on evidence dating back to the 1920s which clearly demonstrates that parental answers to questions pertaining to the amount of reading material freely available to preschool children at home are closely tied to children's interest in school as well as to their later academic performances (Bradley & Caldwell, 1984; Gray & Munroe, 1930; Hanson, 1975; Hewison & Tizard, 1980; Morrow, 1983; Terman, 1954). The second Item stems from an equally well established finding that a child's knowledge of the alphabet is one of the best single indicators of future school success and that parents can provide an accurate assessment of this knowledge (Colligan, 1976; Johansson, 1965; Simner, 1983; Vukelich & McAdam, 1978). Finally, item three was included because of a growing body of evidence linking a parent's scholastic expectations for their child to the child's actual achievement in school. Specifically, according the findings reported by Entwisle (Entwisle & Baker, 1983; Entwisle & Hyduk, 1978) as well as Hess, et al. (1984) parents who expect their children to do poorly in school are more likely to have children with learning problems than parents who expect success.[1] The present investigation was undertaken to obtain evidence on the long term predictive validity of the CSRI.

Place Figure 1 about here

Procedure

Subjects

For the purpose of replication we made use of two independent samples totalling 226 kindergarten children and their

caregivers. Sample 1 consisted of 112 children (60 male, 52 female) while Sample 2 contained 114 children (64 male, 50 female). The samples were obtained from 11 public elementary schools located in lower and middle income areas of London, Ontario, an urban center with a population of nearly 300,000. While detailed demographic information can be found in Simner (1987, 1988) it is worth mentioning that despite the fact that approximately 10% of the children came from bilingual backgrounds, all of the children were fluent in English and the mean age of the children at the time the CSRI was completed was 64 months (range: 59 to 70 months).

Method

The CSRI was administered in November or early December to the parent or guardian who claimed to be most familiar with the child's daily behaviors. Hence, the child's mother was the person interviewed in 84% of the cases. A total score that ranged from 3 through 22 for each child was then obtained by adding each of the separate ratings. The mean total score for the children in Sample 1 was 15.73 (SD = 3.51) whereas the mean total score for the children in Sample 2 was 15.69 (SD = 3.50).

Reliability

The most appropriate way to obtain information on the reliability of a screening device like the CSRI is to have two individuals who are equally familiar with the child provide independent ratings on each item. Unfortunately, such an ideal can only be achieved under exceptional circumstances when caregiver inventories are used because it is rare to find homes in which both parents or guardians spend equal time in similar situations with their children (for a discussion of this matter see Lichtenstein & Ireton, 1984, p. 84). The alternative method of choice, and the one used in the present investigation, is to have the same person respond to all of the items on two different occasions. Here though it is necessary to allow sufficient time to elapse between interviews to guard against a caregiver answering an item in the same way twice because they recalled their previous response.

Thus, to obtain information on reliability we selected, at random, 26 caregivers. Whereas the first interview was held in November or early December, the second interview took place in April. The product-moment correlations generated by the caregivers on the two separate occasions are as follows: item one: $r_{xy} = .85$, $p<.001$; item two: $r_{xy} = .78$, $p<.001$; item three: $r_{xy} = .86$, $p<.001$. Moreover, the product-moment correlation for

the total score (r_{xy} = .92, $p<.001$), which is the only score that we recommend using, is within the range considered acceptable for tests that are to be used solely for screening purposes (Lichtenstein & Ireton, 1984; Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1985).

Achievement Criteria

To determine how closely the children's total scores on the CSRI related to the children's subsequent school performances we employed two measures of school achievement. Both measures were chosen to comply with the recommendation that to evaluate research which is supposed to relate to actual school performance, meaningful or realistic measures that reflect actual classroom work should be employed (Lazar & Darlington, 1982). The first measure consisted of the children's command of the core curriculum as judged by the children's teachers. At the end of kindergarten we obtained each child's class standing from the June promotion lists. These lists, prepared by the children's teachers, made use of a 12 point scale with values ranging from D- to A+. For the children whom we were able to follow through the end of grades one and two, we obtained the teacher's June report card marks, which also ranged on a 12 point scale from D- to A+, in reading, written composition, and arithmetic. Finally, to determine the children's overall level of in-class achievement at the end of these grades we calculated each child's average mark across the three subjects.

The second measure consisted of the children's scores on the following standardized tests: the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) by Jastak and Jastak (1976, Level-1); the alphabet knowledge, number knowledge, and relational concepts subtests found in Lesiak's (1978) Developmental Tasks for Kindergarten Readiness (DTKR); the word identification subtest from the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test (WRMT) by Woodcock (1974, Form-B); and the addition, subtraction, numerical reasoning, and word problem subtests from the Keymath Diagnostic Arithmetic Test (KDAT) by Connolly, Nachtman, and Pritchett (1971). These tests, given in the spring semester of either kindergarten or grade one to approximately 80% of the children, were selected because they contained material taught in class which permitted a further appraisal of the children's command of the core curriculum.

While every attempt was made to locate all of the children as they progressed through school, budget limitation prevented us from collecting information on children who moved to schools outside London. Also, we did not obtain follow-up data on children who transferred to denominational schools or to foreign language schools because the differences in curriculum that

characterized these other schools could have affected the children's performances on the criteria discussed below. The children who were lost from our investigation for these reasons, however, were very similar at the outset to the children who remained throughout our study. For instance, the CSRI mean score (15.90) and standard deviation (3.52) obtained from the 35 children in Sample 1 who moved, were almost identical to the mean score (16.08) and standard deviation (3.42) produced by the 63 children in this sample who were in grade two at the end of the study. Therefore, it would seem that this loss of children which resulted from a change in address probably had little impact on the evidence reported below.

Results

Table 1 contains the product-moment correlations between the children's total scores on the CSRI obtained near the start of kindergarten and the children's performances in school through the end of grade two. (No reliable sex differences were found, and so it was not considered necessary to report separate correlations for the males and females in each sample.) As the findings in this table indicate, when teacher evaluation was the performance criterion the correlations ranged from .32 through .63 with the majority of correlations clustering between .41 and .57. Moreover, when the criterion was achievement test performance, the correlations extended from .37 through .66 with the majority clustering between .43 and .62. This evidence, then, which is quite similar in both samples, shows that the children scores on the CSRI, obtained shortly after the children started kindergarten, were linked to the children's later school achievement across the curriculum. It is also worth mentioning that the correlations in Table 1 are similar to the correlations reported by others who have assessed the predictive validity of more traditional screening instruments such as the MaCarthy Scales of Children's Abilities, the Metropolitan Readiness Test, the Mykelbust Pupil Rating Scale, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, and the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test, to name a few (Flynn & Flynn, 1978; Funk, Sterner, & Green, 1986; Massoth & Levenson, 1982; Meyer, Wilgosh, & Mueller, 1990; Simner, 1983). The findings in Table 1 also are in line with the predictive validity correlations generated by such parent assessment devices as the HOME Inventory (Bradley & Caldwell, 1981) and the Personality Inventory for Children (Keenan & Lachar, 1988), devices which take far longer than the CSRI to administer and to score.

Place Table 1 about here

To show more clearly the nature of this relationship between the children's CSRI scores that children's subsequent school achievements, Table 2 contains the findings organized in an expectancy table format. To construct Table 2 we followed the guidelines suggested by Brown (1983), Lichtenstein and Ireton (1984), and Stanley (1965).

First, of the 226 children in our follow-up work, 223 children completed either kindergarten, grade one or grade two prior to moving. These 223 children were divided into three categories based on the teachers' end-of-year promotion evaluations and decisions. In each case only the most recently available information was used to determine which category best described a given child. That is, grade two information was employed for those children whom we were able to follow through this level. In the case of the other children we either made use of grade one or kindergarten information depending on when the children were lost from our study.

The children whom we placed in the "poor performance" category were the ones who failed, were placed in a special education class, or were assigned to a slower or junior section of the next grade. The category labeled "uncertain performance" contained children whose mastery of curriculum either was judged to be somewhat marginal or about whom the teachers were indeed uncertain. Finally, the "good performance" category had children who were not experiencing problems in any of the main academic areas covered in the primary grades. These were the children whose marks ranged from B- to A+ on the 12-point scale referred to above. Next, we chose as cutoff points on the CSRI, total scores which corresponded to 1 SD above as well as 1 SD below the mean. Because the mean and SD for each sample were almost identical (see above) this procedure resulted in cutoffs for both samples of 12 and 19.

As the evidence in Table 2 indicates, the odds of a child later being in the poor performance as opposed to being in the good performance category were fairly high if the child's score on the CSRI near the start of kindergarten was equal to or greater than 1 SD <u>below</u> the mean. On the other hand, if the child's total score was equal to or greater than 1 SD <u>above</u> the mean, the likelihood of this happening was fairly low. Thus, it would seem that for those children whose total scores on the CSRI

are near the bottom of the scale some form of help should be provided while the children are still in kindergarten.[2] To underscore this point, of the 223 children in Sample 1 and 2 combined, 9 children had total scores which were equal to or greater than 2 SD below the mean. By the end of the follow-up period, of these 9 children, 7 (78%) had failed or were in special education classes.

Place Table 2 about here

Discussion

The items that comprise the CSRI were selected because our search of the evidence revealed only three areas of information that parents have access to which are suitable for use in developing an effective inventory. These areas are (1) the literacy level at home, (2) the child's command of certain readiness skills, and (3) the parent's expectations for the child's success in school. It is worth noting that in developing this inventory we piloted a number of questions that tapped the same pool of information assessed by these three items. As one example, to measure literacy in the home we borrowed from other inventories and asked parents to estimate how frequently they read to this child. Our pilot results showed, however, that the answers elicited by these other questions were far less effective in identifying the at-risk child than the answers to the three questions finally selected for the CSRI. Moreover, this pilot work also showed that including these other questions along with the three items on the CSRI did not improve the inventory's accuracy as a screening device. Thus the three items that comprise the CSRI represent the best combination of items that we were able to find in our effort to develop an alternative screening instrument that could be used in situations where it may be difficult to employ other more traditional screening measures. The evidence reported above suggests that if the CSRI is used in such situations, it may be possible to identify an at-risk child near the start of kindergarten who otherwise might not receive help until much later in the kindergarten year when it become more feasible to employ these other measures.

Finally it is worth mentioning that, because the items on this inventory rely on subjective judgements made by the children's parents or guardians, caregivers in school districts other than the one where we obtained our data might employ

slightly different standards in arriving at these judgements. If so, these different standards could affect the cutoff scores referred to above since these scores were chosen to correspond to values 1 SD above as well as 1 SD below the mean score based on the caregivers that we employed in our samples. Therefore, in line with a recommendation made by Lichtenstein and Ireton (1984) as well as Salvia and Ysseldyke (1985), we suggest that local cutoff scores should be obtained and compared to the cutoff scores mentioned above. If there is a discrepancy between these local cutoff scores and our cutoff scores then the local scores should take precedent when the CSRI is used elsewhere for screening purposes.

Notes

[1]This statement should not be interpreted to suggest that a parent who expects less of a child necessarily causes the child to fail. Some parents might have lower expectations for their children because their children are far more interested in play than in school. Later these children might receive poor marks because this interest in play remains and interferes with the child's ability to learn in the classroom. In other words, it is always possible that whatever the child's characteristics are that lead a parent to anticipate a learning problem, it is these characteristics that persist and later become responsible for the difficulties the child experiences in school.

[2] For references and guidelines on ways to assist preschool children at risk for failure see Bricker (1986), Goldring and Presbrey (1986), Guralnick and Bennett (1986), Roopnarine and Johnson (1987), Simner (1991), Stallings and Stipek (1986), or Wright (1983).

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Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the many teachers, principals, and vice principals as well as the members of the Educational Research Services Division of the London Board of Education who made this undertaking possible. I would also like to thank Michelle Adams, Kim Cornelisse, Sharon Harrower, Kelley McCaughen, Berenice Saracoglu, and Deanna Talbot for the important role they played in helping to collect the data.

Name of Child_____

Name of Caregiver_____

Date of Interview_____

_____

Instructions: The parent or guardian who knows the child best should answer all three questions appearing below. Place the rating associated with each answer on the appropriate line in the column to the right. Add the three separate ratings to obtain the child's total score.

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1) Approximately how many books that are appropriate for your child's age are readily available to your child at home? (If a parent asks for clarification, cite the names of several popular children's books to illustrate the type of book that would be considered appropriate for their child's age.) Rating

	none	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	more
Rating:	1	2	3	4	5	6

_____

2) At present, approximately how many of the capital letters in the alphabet do you think your child could name correctly if you showed your child pictures of these letters one at a time in a random or mixed-up order?

	none	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-26
Rating:	1	2	3	4	5	6

_____

3) Based on a scale from 1 to 10, how well do you expect your child will be doing in reading at the end of first grade in relation to the other children in your child's class (1 = at the bottom of the class; 5 = about average; 10 = at the top of the class)? _____

Total Score _____

Figure 1. Caregiver's School Readiness Inventory

TABLE 1. Product-moment correlations between children's total scores on the CSRI obtained near the start of kindergarten and the children's subsequent performances in school.

	KINDERGARTEN PERFORMANCE		FIRST GRADE PERFORMANCE						SECOND GRADE PERFORMANCE			
					FINAL REPORT CARD MARKS				FINAL REPORT CARD MARKS			
	WRAT[1]	PROMOTION LIST RANKING	WRMT[2]	KDAT[3]	READING	WRITTEN COMPOSITION	ARITHMETIC	OVERALL PERFORMANCE	READING	WRITTEN COMPOSITION	ARITHMETIC	OVERALL PERFORMANCE
Sample 1 (N = 112)	*** .66 (N=108)	*** .63 (N=110)	*** .44 (N=72)	*** .37 (N=71)	*** .45 (N=86)	** .33 (N=79)	*** .39 (N=86)	*** .41 (N=86)	*** .45 (N=63)	** .32 (N=63)	*** .45 (N=63)	*** .42 (N=63)
Sample 2 (N=114)	*** .62 (N=106)	*** .53 (N=114)	*** .60 (N=70)	*** .50 (N=70)	*** .45 (N=84)	*** .59 (N=79)	*** .45 (N=84)	*** .54 (N=84)	*** .48 (N=53)	*** .57 (N=53)	*** .48 (N=53)	*** .57 (N=53)

***p<.001 **p<.01

[1] Wide Range Achievement Test

[2] Woodcock Reading Mastery Test

[3] Keymath Diagnostic Arithmetic Test

Table 2. Expectancy table showing the numbers of children in the poor performance, uncertain performance, and good performance categories based on the children's total scores on the CSRI.

Sample 1

CSRI Total Score	Performance Category: Poor Performance	Uncertain Performance	Good Performance
19-22	2	5	21
13-18	14	19	28
3-12	13	4	4

Sample 2

CSRI Total Score	Performance Category: Poor Performance	Uncertain Performance	Good Performance
19-22	1	8	19
13-18	18	26	22
3-12	11	8	0